CAPTAINS OF THE CIVIL WAR

BY

WILLIAM WOOD

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CAPTAINS OF THE CIVIL WAR

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CAPTAINS OF THE CIVIL WAR

A CHRONICLE OF THE BLUE AND THE GRAY

BY WILLIAM WOOD

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TO

MY AMERICAN FRIENDS

OF THE

BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

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PREFACE

SIXTY years ago today the guns that thundered round Fort Sumter began the third and greatest modern civil war fought by English-speaking people. This war was quite as full of politics as were the other two — the War of the American Revolution and that of Puritan and Cavalier. But, though the present Chronicle never ignores the vital correlations between statesmen and commanders, it is a book of warriors, through and through.

I gratefully acknowledge the indispensable assistance of Colonel G. J. Fiebeger, a West Point expert, and of Dr. Allen Johnson, chief editor of the series and Professor of American History at Yale.

WILLIAM WOOD,

Late Colonel commanding 8th Royal Rifles, and Officer-in-charge, Canadian Special Mission Overseas.

QUEBEC,
April 12, 1921.

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CHAPTER I

THE CLASH: 1861

STATES which claimed a sovereign right to secede from the Union naturally claimed the corresponding right to resume possession of all the land they had ceded to that Union's Government for the use of its naval and military posts. So South Carolina, after leading the way to secession on December 20, 1860, at once began to work for the retrocession of the forts defending her famous cotton port of Charleston. These defenses, being of vital consequence to both sides, were soon to attract the strained attention of the whole country.

There were three minor forts: Castle Pinckney, dozing away, in charge of a solitary sergeant, on an island less than a mile from the city; Fort Moultrie, feebly garrisoned and completely at the mercy of

attackers on its landward side; and Fort Johnson over on James Island. Lastly, there was the world-renowned Fort Sumter, which then stood, unfinished and ungarrisoned, on a little islet beside the main ship channel, at the entrance to the harbor, and facing Fort Moultrie just a mile away. The proper war garrison of all the forts should have been over a thousand men. The actual garrison — including officers, band, and the Castle Pinckney sergeant — was less than a hundred. It was, however, loyal to the Union; and its commandant, Major Robert Anderson, though born in the slave-owning State of Kentucky, was determined to fight.

The situation, here as elsewhere, was complicated by Floyd, President Buchanan's Secretary of War, soon to be forced out of office on a charge of misapplying public funds. Floyd, as an ardent Southerner, was using the last lax days of the Buchanan Government to get the army posts ready for capitulation whenever secession should have become an accomplished fact. He urged on construction, repairs, and armament at Charleston, while refusing to strengthen the garrison, in order, as he said, not to provoke Carolina. Moreover, in November he had replaced old Colonel Gardner, a Northern veteran of "1812," by

Anderson the Southerner, in whom he hoped to find a good capitulator. But this time Floyd was wrong.

The day after Christmas Anderson's little garrison at Fort Moultrie slipped over to Fort Sumter under cover of the dark, quietly removed Floyd's workmen, who were mostly Baltimore Secessionists, and began to prepare for defense. Next morning Charleston was furious and began to prepare for attack. The South Carolina authorities at once took formal possession of Pinckney and Moultrie; and three days later seized the United States Arsenal in Charleston itself. Ten days later again, on January 9, 1861, the *Star of the West*, a merchant vessel coming in with reinforcements and supplies for Anderson, was fired on and forced to turn back. Anderson, who had expected a man-of-war, would not fire in her defense, partly because he still hoped there might yet be peace.

While Charleston stood at gaze and Anderson at bay the ferment of secession was working fast in Florida, where another tiny garrison was all the Union had to hold its own. This garrison, under two loyal young lieutenants, Slemmer and Gilman, occupied Barrancas Barracks in Pensacola Bay. Late at night on the eighth of January (the day

before the *Star of the West* was fired on at Charleston) some twenty Secessionists came to seize the old Spanish Fort San Carlos, where, up to that time, the powder had been kept. This fort, though lying close beside the barracks, had always been unoccupied; so the Secessionists looked forward to an easy capture. But, to their dismay, an unexpected guard challenged them, and, not getting the proper password in reply, dispersed them with the first shots of the Civil War.

Commodore Armstrong sat idle at the Pensacola Navy Yard, distracted between the Union and secession. On the ninth Slemmer received orders from Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief at Washington, to use all means in defense of Union property. Next morning Slemmer and his fifty faithful men were landed on Santa Rosa Island, just one mile across the bay, where the dilapidated old Fort Pickens stood forlorn. Two days later the Commodore surrendered the Navy Yard, the Stars and Stripes were lowered, and everything ashore fell into the enemy's hands. There was no flagstaff at Fort Pickens; but the Union colors were at once hung out over the northwest bastion, in full view of the shore, while the *Supply* and *Wyandotte*, the only naval vessels in the bay, and both commanded

by loyal men, mastheaded extra colors and stood clear. Five days afterwards they had to sail for New York; and Slemmer, whose total garrison had been raised to eighty by the addition of thirty sailors, was left to hold Fort Pickens if he could.

He had already been summoned to surrender by Colonel Chase and Captain Farrand, who had left the United States Army and Navy for the service of the South. Chase, like many another Southern officer, was stirred to his inmost depths by his own change of allegiance. "I have come," he said, "to ask of you young officers, officers of the same army in which I have spent the best and happiest years of my life, the surrender of this fort; and fearing that I might not be able to say it as I ought, and also to have it in proper form, I have put it in writing and will read it." He then began to read. But his eyes filled with tears, and, stamping his foot, he said: "I can't read it. Here, Farrand, you read it." Farrand, however, pleading that his eyes were weak, handed the paper to the younger Union officer, saying, "Here, Gilman, you have good eyes, please read it." Slemmer refused to surrender and held out till reinforced in April, by which time the war had begun in earnest. Fort Pickens was never taken. On the contrary, it supported the